



Streamlining and modernising the National Construction Code (NCC)

23 February 2026

Executive Summary

National Shelter welcomes the Australian Government's inquiry into streamlining and modernising the National Construction Code (NCC). We support the goal of improving productivity, usability, and national consistency without weakening minimum standards that protect safety, accessibility, and energy efficiency. We believe housing, particularly social and affordable housing, is essential social infrastructure. The NCC must therefore balance construction efficiency with outcomes that reduce lifetime housing costs, support ageing in place and inclusion, and protect renters and low-income households.

Streamlining the NCC should focus on governance reform, national consistency, digital usability, and innovation, while locking in the accessibility and energy-efficiency gains of NCC 2022. National Shelter therefore recommends six priority reform themes.

- **Keep the NCC a strong national minimum standard**
- **Strengthen governance, independence and transparency**
- **Lock in accessibility through the Liveable Housing Design Standard (LHDS)**
- **Retain and harmonise energy efficiency standards**
- **Improve usability and digital access**
- **Enable innovation and Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), at scale.**

About National Shelter

National Shelter is Australia's leading non-government housing advocacy group, representing the voices of people on low incomes since 1975. With a truly national footprint, comprising members' interests in most states and territories and associate members in specialist fields. As an independent, member-based network, it unites national housing experts, peak bodies, and key sector partners to inform advocacy with diverse experience and local knowledge.

National Shelter focuses on advancing housing justice, renters' rights, and affordability through evidence-based policy and strong partnerships. The organisation works collaboratively, in a non-partisan way, with governments, diverse industries, housing and homelessness peaks, sector leaders, partners and people with lived experience of housing insecurity or homelessness to shape fair, sustainable, and healthy housing outcomes for all.

Context and Purpose of the Review

The Australian Government has initiated a program to modernise the NCC to create a streamlined, easy-to-use, and cost-effective regulatory system that upholds high standards for building quality and safety. This work aligns with commitments to increase the supply of new housing under the wider national housing agenda. The Building Ministers have agreed to pause additional residential changes in the NCC until mid-2029, while usability, innovation and productivity reforms proceed.

National Shelter strongly supports efforts to improve the clarity, consistency, and usability of the NCC. We also emphasise that reforms must not dilute minimum standards that protect health, safety, accessibility, energy efficiency, and long-term affordability. Essentially, streamlining should mean doing better, not doing less.

Our Key Recommendations

1. The role of the NCC

National Shelter supports the NCC remaining a national, minimum, performance-based code that provides clarity and certainty across jurisdictions.

The NCC should:

- Set clear minimum standards for safety, accessibility, amenity, and sustainability.
- Avoid positioning the document as a de facto “best practice” standard, while enabling best-practice approaches to be taken up through defined pathways, including deemed-to-satisfy (DTS) provisions, guidance materials, and procurement requirements.
- Be applied consistently across jurisdictions, with variations tightly constrained and transparently justified.

Fragmentation and inconsistency in NCC adoption increase costs, slow delivery, and undermine productivity. These impacts are ultimately borne by households, including renters and providers of social and affordable housing.

2. Governance and process

National Shelter supports reforms to strengthen the independence, transparency, and capability of NCC governance arrangements.

In particular, we recommend:

- Strengthening the independence of the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) as a provider of evidence-based technical advice to Ministers and the Government.
- Clear separation between technical advice, policy direction and ministerial decision-making.
- Improved resourcing of the ABCB to support high-quality regulatory impact analysis, including consideration of distributional and equity impacts.
- Formal inclusion of consumer and community perspectives, reflecting the fact that housing regulation affects all, not only industry participants.

3. Complexity and regulatory burden

National Shelter agrees with industry stakeholders that suggest the NCC has become increasingly complex, with variations, transitional arrangements, and additional requirements introduced by states and territories, making it difficult to navigate. However, complexity should not be addressed by removing or weakening standards that deliver clear public benefit.

3.1 Liveable Housing Design Standard (LHDS)

National Shelter strongly supports the inclusion of the Liveable Housing Design Standard (LHDS) in NCC 2022 and opposes any rollback of these provisions. We believe that a consistent, timely national adoption of the LHDS would have enabled greater cost reductions through the sharing of lessons across borders and economies of scale. Instead, these benefits are undermined when individual jurisdictions fail to consistently apply the NCC, adopt different implementation timelines, or carve out exemptions.

Minimum accessibility features:

- Support ageing in place and reduce demand on health and aged-care systems.
- Reduce costly retrofits later in a dwelling's life.
- Improve housing choice for people with disability, older people, families with children, and people experiencing temporary mobility issues.

We call for:

- Consistent national adoption of the LHDS across all states and territories. For example, states and territories yet to introduce, or otherwise currently not adopting, including New South Wales and Western Australia.
- Clear guidance and education to support implementation.
- A forward-looking review pathway that considers requiring higher standards than Silver level for specific housing types (such as social, affordable and specialist housing), supported by appropriate funding and impact analysis.

3.2 Energy efficiency

National Shelter supports retaining the NCC 2022 7-star energy-efficiency and whole-of-home requirements. These standards reduce household energy bills, improve thermal comfort, and enhance climate resilience, benefits that are particularly important for low-income households.

Energy efficiency standards should be:

- Consistent national adoption of the NCC 2022 energy-efficiency standards across all states and territories, noting that some jurisdictions have not yet implemented the 7-star and whole-of-home provisions.
 - Tasmania has deferred adoption of the NCC 2022 7-star requirements until at least the next code cycle
 - Northern Territory has opted out and continues to apply a 5-star standard, significantly below national minimum expectations.
 - Other jurisdictions (ACT, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales- via its BASIX framework) have adopted or are transitioning to equivalent 7-star performance levels.
- Supported by guidance and transition assistance for smaller builders and not-for-profit housing providers.
- Considered as a core cost-of-living measure, not merely a construction requirement.

- Strengthened over time, with a clear roadmap for future increases to minimum energy-efficiency standards to align with national emissions-reduction goals and ensure long-term affordability for residents.

4. Usability and digital accessibility

National Shelter strongly supports modernising how the NCC is accessed and used.

We recommend:

- Continued development of usability and accessibility of the NCC supported by digital tools that improve navigation, search, and interpretation.
- Plain-English explanatory material alongside technical provisions.
- Improved access to referenced standards, including options for read-only access where standards are mandated for compliance.
- Careful and transparent use of digital and AI-enabled tools to support compliance, while ensuring accountability and auditability.

Improving usability will deliver productivity gains without compromising standards.

5. Innovation, housing diversity, and Modern Methods of Construction (MMC)

National Shelter supports the role of MMC in improving productivity, reducing construction timeframes and supporting housing supply.

To realise these benefits, the NCC should seek to:

- Adopt clear, nationally consistent definitions for MMC.
- Support a national certification framework for MMC manufacturers that is recognised across all jurisdictions.
- Reduce duplication in approvals and inspections for factory-built elements.
- Provide clearer pathways for proven performance solutions to transition into Deemed-to-Satisfy (DTS) provisions.

Innovation must be supported in a way that maintains safety, quality, accessibility, and energy performance, particularly in housing intended for long-term occupation.

6. State and territory variations

As stated earlier in the submission, National Shelter is concerned about the growing volume of state and territory variations in implementing the NCC.

As such, we recommend:

- A strong national discipline to minimise variations.
- Transparent reporting of all variations, including justification and sunset provisions.

- Greater alignment of implementation timeframes to support national consistency and industry capability.
- Accelerated adoption of the minimum housing and energy efficiency standards by remaining state and territory jurisdictions.

Reducing unnecessary variation is one of the most effective ways to improve productivity while maintaining important standards.

Conclusion

National Shelter supports the Government's objective of a simpler, more usable, and more productive NCC, provided that reforms:

- ✓ Lock in minimum standards for accessibility, safety, and energy efficiency
- ✓ Improve national consistency and governance
- ✓ Support innovation without shifting risk onto tenants or communities
- ✓ Recognise housing as long-term social infrastructure with profound impacts on health, equity, and wellbeing.

We welcome ongoing engagement as this process continues and would be pleased to participate in further consultation.

Further contact

For further contact and questions about these proposals, please contact National Shelter as follows:

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